

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

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R 141140Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3240

INFO AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PORS, SOCI, GV, LI

SUBJECT: PUBLIC LASHING RETURNS TO LIBERIA

1. BY EXECUTIVE ORDER RELEASED JANUARY 5 DURING A CABINET MEETING, PUBLIC FLOGGING WAS REINSTITATED AS PUNISHMENT FOR BURGLARY, HOUSE-BREAKING, ROBBERY AND GRAND LARCENY, KNOWN COLLECTIVELY IN THE VERNACULAR AS "ROGUING." IN EACH CASE, PUNISHMENT IS TO BE FLOGGING NOT TO EXCEED 25 LASHES ON THE BARE BACK IN PUBLIC. FOR ROBBERY, BURGLARY AND GRAND LARCENY, PUNISHMENT WILL INCLUDE JAIL SENTENCES OF FROM FIVE TO SEVEN YEARS; FOR HOUSEBREAKING THE PUNISHMENT IS TO INCLUDE A FINE NOT TO EXCEED \$500.

2. ON JANUARY 11, THE FIRST GROUP IN MONROVIA TO BE PUNISHED UNDER THIS EXECUTIVE ORDER ("TEN NOTORIOUS ROGUES", ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BULLETIN) RECEIVED 25 LASHES EACH, USING A CANE, WHILE HANDCUFFED TO POLES. A CROWD, ESTIMATED AT 8,000 BY OFFICIAL SOURCES, WITNESSED THE FLOGGING. ON JANUARY 12, THE TELEVISION NEWS GAVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE FLOGGINGS.

3. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANUARY 13,
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DIRECTOR OF POLICE EDWIN HARMON SAID THAT FLOGGINGS HAD BEEN DIS-CONTINUED DURING THE LATTER YEARS OF THE TUBMAN REGIME AFTER YOUNG INTELLECTUALS, RETURNING FROM STUDIES OVERSEAS, HAD COM-PLAINED THAT THIS PUNISHMENT WAS CRUEL AND PRIMITIVE. HARMON DISMISSED THIS CRITICISM OF FLOGGINGS WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS SUITED TO THE LIBERIAN ENVIRONMENT. HE SPOKE CONTEMPTUOUSLY OF LIBERIAN INTELLECTUALS WHO MAINTAIN THAT CRIMINALS SHOULD BE "REHABILITATED."

WHAT LIBERIANS FEAR MOST, HE SAID, IS TO BE SHAMED IN PUBLIC AND NOTED THAT MANY PARENTS HAD BROUGHT THEIR CHILDREN TO VIEW THE FLOGGINGS AS A WARNING OF THE SHAME THAT WOULD COME IF THEIR CHILDREN ENGAGED IN CRIME. HARMON SAID THAT, IN ANY CASE, MOST OF THE IDLERS AND FLOATING POPULATION IN MONROVIA, FROM WHICH THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT IS DRAWN, WERE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, AND THAT ONLY ONE OR TWO PERSONS OUT OF EVERY FIVE ARRESTED FOR CRIME WERE LIBERIAN. TO HELP CURB THIS PROBLEM, HE SAID, SOME 30 GUINEANS HAD BEEN ROUNDED UP RECENTLY AND TAKEN TO THE GUINEAN BORDER, RELEASED THERE, AND WARNED TO STAY OUT OF LIBERIA. HARMON SAID THAT NO ONE SHOULD WASTE SYMPATHIES ON ROGUES BECAUSE LIBERIA IS A LAND SO "BLESSED WITH ADEQUATE LAND IN A GOOD CLIMATE THAT WITH MINIMUM EFFORT A MAN CAN GROW ALL THE FRUIT, VEGETABLES AND RICE HE NEEDS."

4. DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE ROLAND BARNES, IN CONVERSATION WITH THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANUARY 12, SAID THAT IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO INFLICT A STRONGER PUNISHMENT FOR ROGUES THAN PUBLIC FLOGGINGS, HE WOULD ADVOCATE IT. EDUCATION MINISTER HOFF, ON THE OTHER HAND, COMMENTED TO THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THE SAME DAY THAT HE DOUBTED THAT PUBLIC FLOGGINGS WERE AN EFFECTIVE DETERRENT TO CRIME.

5. COMMENT: AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC THERE IS LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR ROGUES BUT ALSO SOME SKEPTICISM CONCERNING THE USEFULNESS OF THIS TYPE OF PUNISHMENT. ONE CYNIC NOTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A LARGE NUMBER OF PICK-POCKETS AT WORK AMONG THE CROWD WATCHING THE LASHINGS.

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6. THE FLOGGINGS THEMSELVES, ACCORDING TO OBSERVERS, WERE AN UNPLEASANT SIGHT. BODIES JERKED AND TWISTED SPASMODICALLY UNDER THE IMPACT OF THE CANE, AND IN SOME CASES THE LEGS OF THE VICTIMS HAD TO BE HELD BY GUARDS. MANY OF THOSE BEING PUNISHED APPEARED TO BE IN THEIR TEENS.
CARTER

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